

**DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**  
**LEPC REPORT**  
**(Drafted 17 October 2006)**

**Public Safety Communications:** County public safety communications efforts have primarily focused on three areas since last spring: improvements in local coverage; modernization of our LMR capabilities; and facilitating installation of the proposed Interoperable Montana (IM) microwave loop which is to pass through the county. What follows is a summary of where we are at this point.

Installation of the new Table Mountain repeater in the NW corner of the county in July improved coverage in the western half of the county, but caused interference problems with the Mt Baldy repeater, necessitating modification of the latter with a new rcvr/xmtr so that it could be turned off and on at Dispatch. Baldy is now primarily a back up repeater, usually turned off. The GE Master II repeater taken from Mt. Baldy was then installed in place of the old Ruby repeater in order to allow continued paging and local tactical coverage above Ruby Dam. The unit that was at Ruby will be reinstalled at MVRFD Firehouse #2 in the SE corner of the county within the next few weeks to provide coverage to the Quake Lake/Raynolds Pass area. Installation of the new Lone Peak repeater (to provide coverage in Big Sky and Jack Creek) will be completed once the ski-lift is reactivated, probably in November. This, of course, assumes receipt of the necessary frequency license for that repeater, which is expected momentarily. Meanwhile, in order to accommodate all this increase in repeaters, a new dispatch console and primary rcvr/transmitter on Virginia City hill should be installed within the next week or ten days. All of these repeater changes are considered to be somewhat temporary in nature and are being undertaken in a very austere fiscal environment. The plan is that the statewide Interoperable Montana initiative will provide an opportunity for more permanent, more capable and more robust improvements to the local communications picture within the next few years.

Anticipating the possibility of a microwave loop coming through the county next summer as part of the Interoperability Montana program, we have begun work on the specifics of site locations, characteristics, requirements, siting agreements, etc. for each of the three proposed sites within the County (Barter Ranch, Virginia City Pass and Lone Peak). Since the remainder of the loop continues with sites in Beaverhead County, some of which may be of near-term local use (Sawtell Peak, for example), we have been working closely with our neighbors in Beaverhead County as well as continuing to coordinate closely with the South Central Montana Interoperability Consortium of which we are a part. Pleased as we are that Interoperability Montana is moving forward with this extension (primarily using the state's homeland security funding to date), we will be unable to make use of its capabilities locally until we can determine how to add a (probably two-hop) connection to Dispatch with attendant upgrade to the PSAP/Dispatch. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, these three microwave sites potentially could also house some of our local repeaters, thereby improving their capabilities and reliability.

We also have a FY 06 Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) application that has passed peer review for replacement of portable, mobile, station radios and pagers for all the county fire departments and emergency medical service providers. Prospects are looking good for the County, as near as we can determine. Favorable action on that grant would represent a giant leap forward for county public safety communications and interoperability, including compliance with forthcoming FCC requirements for narrow-banding as well as giving digital and trunking capability to key responders.

**Radio Inventory:** Recently a requirement has been levied on each Montana county to provide a detailed (including serial numbers!) inventory of all public safety radios currently in use. We will be working on this over the next few weeks and will be in contact with each of the responder agencies as soon as the details become clearer.

**Big Sky:** Consultants from Firescope Mid-America, of Greeley, Colorado, visited Big Sky and the surrounding area the first week in October to carry out a contracted Public Safety Planning Study (BSPSPS) of the Madison County portion of Big Sky. They met individually with a large number of interested parties and held a public meeting in the Yellowstone Conference Center as part of their information gathering effort. A draft report of their findings and analysis of any alternatives for provision of public safety services to Big Sky is expected about mid-November. Public input will again be solicited at that time. A final report is to be completed by 10 December and presented to the Board of Commissioners.

**ICS/NIMS Training:** Steve DiGiovanna conducted NIMS/ICS training for county employees on 21, 27 and 28 September in the Courthouse. This was a part of our ongoing NIMS compliance effort, of course, but it also helped the students be better able to carry out their assignments in case of a major catastrophe. Steve has expressed his willingness to tailor such training to the needs of any of the responder agencies, health care facilities, governmental entities and the like in order to further the familiarity and comfort our public safety responders and health care providers have with NIMS and its associated Incident Command System. Such training can be arranged either by contacting Steve (who works as one of our county Dispatchers) or me.

**CCC/CERT:** CCC, of which the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is a part, is a sub-committee of the LEPC. Melinda Tichenor coordinates the program on the behalf of the LEPC. While it has developed very well within Madison County over the last year, prospects for continuation of federal funding at the local level do not appear to be good. Melinda and her crew are actively seeking to develop alternatives and the Department has been supporting that effort.

CERT training scheduled for Twin Bridges on 7, 14 and 15 October was postponed due to a paucity of students. It has been rescheduled for 4, 11 and 12 November at the same location. This program needs the active support of the LEPC and all of our public safety agencies. It not only helps the individuals and families who are our neighbors become better able to cope with disasters and emergencies, it also has the potential to be a big help to our public safety service providers under such circumstances. CERT trains people to help themselves, but it also develops of cadre of people who can assist the responders as they try to cope with large scale incidents. Its economical; has tremendous potential; and it deserves whatever help the LEPC and its individual members can provide.

**WUI/Defensible Space:** Although federal funds have long been available for use by individual Madison County homeowners to help them create defensible space around homes located in the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI), this program has never taken off in our county. Joe Husar has been trying to jump start the program as part of his Risk Mitigation Coordinator duties but with little success. We will make one last effort to accelerate participation and then, if we still cannot generate significant interest, reluctantly turn the available money back for use somewhere else. Please see Joe for details and help try to get this wildland fire mitigation program back on track. It's in all of our best interests.

**School Security:** We have scheduled a meeting of all the county school superintendents/school administrators and local law enforcement representatives for 24 October in Sheridan High School at noon. The objective is to explore school security issues and planning both from the perspective of the school officials and from that of the law enforcement authorities. In the process, we can see how well the plans, procedures and intentions of all concerned mesh, what differences exist and/or what, if anything, needs to be done to improve things. Recent events at schools across the nation lend special impetus to such a meeting. If so inclined, I would encourage the LEPC to send a representative.

**Director Position:** The Board of Commissioners will soon be advertising for my replacement as Director of Emergency Management. The change-over is currently scheduled for 1 January. If you know of any potential candidates that you think would be good for the job, be sure to keep them informed and encourage them to apply.